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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Gentlemen and Gentle Ladies of the Nez Perce National Forest:

I have been made aware of your desire for public comment on your plan of management for the Nez Perce National Forest. Please consider the following testament as my comment for how I would like to see the Nez Perce National Forest managed as we move into the future.

I have hiked, fished, backcountry skied, backpacked and hunted in the Great Burn Wilderness Study Area since the early 1980s. I have found excitement, wonder, and exhilaration as I gazed on the unique and unmatched beauty of the area. I have encountered countless Moose, Elk, Big Horn sheep, Mountain goats and Mule, and White Tail deer, I have seen Bobcat, Mountain lion, and Wolf tracks, and one day, I even encountered a sow Grizzly with her two cubs of the year near Cache Creek. To say the least, I have had the most remarkable wilderness experiences while recreating in the Great Burn WSA.

I have hiked to almost every lake along the divide from Leo Lake in the south to Cliff Lake near Lookout Pass in the north. I have only occasionally encountered other people using the areas, on occasion I have had to make way for outfitters mule teams as they move their hunting and fishing camps, and twice I encountered Idaho Fish and Game wardens who checked my fishing licenses, but generally speaking, I have felt like I was on my own when recreating in the Great Burn WSA. Those times are when I feel most alive, and I cherish my ability to find that kind of experience just a short drive and hike from my home in Missoula.

One day while backpacking in the late fall with my friend and his son, we had a tribe of Mountain Goats come down from the ridge above Heart lake right down into our camp on the west side of the cirque. We watched them for hours as they made their way towards us carefully negotiating the cliffs and ledges on their descent. We had set our camp in an area they frequented, and though they were wary of our presence, they grazed very near our tents as we watched and photographed them from a safe distance. It was a remarkable experience and I am loath to think that these magnificent animals are challenged and put in danger by snowmobiles that illegally use this area in the winter and spring. I will attach a photo of that experience to this letter.

I have backcountry skied from Hoodoo pass over to the chutes above Trio Lakes and also in the Saint Regis Basin southwest of Lookout Pass, where the constant roar and whine of snowmobiles was in my ears all day. The differences in my enjoyment of the surrounding environment were like night and day. The joy of the days where all I could hear was the wind over the ridge and the swish of my skis and poles and the sound of my breath that become in my mind a spiritually rejuvenating experience. And the days I spent in the St.Regis Basin were marred by un-natural pollution of noises and smells that permeated the air and snow and turned my efforts from pure bliss to something less wholesome, something less fulfilling.

I have also had some less than wonderful experiences while hiking. One day south of Hoodoo Pass my partner and I had to jump off the trail quickly to avoid being hit by several men on motorcycles as they rampaged on the divide trail. I have also come across several sites of snowmobile wreckage in the cirques above Heart, Pearl and Trio Lakes. There were plastic hoods and windshield pieces strewn in a rather large area. To be frank, I found these experiences repulsive and they degraded my faith that the Great Burn WSA was being managed correctly.

I concede that most of my recreation has occurred on the Montana side of the border, and I recognize that the Nez Perce National Forest is predominately in Idaho, but I would like to stress that the Great Burn WSA encompasses an ecosystem that includes both Montana and Idaho, and that management of that ecosystem should be a coordinated effort between the Nez Perce National Forest and the Lolo National Forest. It would be

impossible to maintain true wilderness characteristics of the Montana side of the divide if snowmobiles and motorcycles were allowed access to areas in Idaho that are mere feet away from a more strictly managed WSA. In short, it is my belief that the rules regulating motorized and mechanized devices in Wilderness Study Areas like the Great Burn WSA should be strictly enforced, and the results of that management should be a recreation plan that excludes motorized and mechanized devices

I am a proponent of quiet winter recreation and I believe that motorized and mechanical vehicles never belong in Wilderness Areas or in Wilderness Study Areas that have not yet achieved full wilderness protection.

I implore you on behalf of myself and the wildlife that have their existence in the Great Burn Wilderness Study Area to make your plans for the future management of the area in a very conservative way. I ask that you use definitions and regulations in the strictest possible interpretation to ensure the area remains worthy of Wilderness consideration. I request that you make no rules or interpretation of regulations that would allow any mechanized or motorized use within the boundaries of the Great Burn Wilderness Study Area. I ask that you neither increase nor decrease the amount of area within the Great Burn WSA and that you maintain the existing boundaries under consideration for inclusion in lands protected by laws governing Wilderness Areas. I request that you continue to protect the areas within the Nez Perce National Forest that are under Wilderness consideration until our Congressional delegations representing Montana, Idaho and the rest of our Nation make a final determination on the suitability of the Great Burn WSA for inclusion as a Wilderness Area worthy of the strictest possible preservation.

I hope and pray that this designation is forthcoming and that my children and grandchildren will be able to walk and ski and have their spiritual awakenings in the splendor of the Great Burn. I hope and pray that the professionals that oversee these remarkable environs will continue to work in the most honorable way to protect and preserve the Great Burn Wilderness Study Area.

Thank you for considering my comments regarding your future plans for the Nez Perce National Forest and the Great Burn WSA lands that are included within your purview.

Sincerely;  
Timothy F. Sharp